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The case of the Netherlands

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Liberal Education and Core Texts: The case of the Netherlands

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Whereas a core curriculum – with or without an emphasis on great books – may be found at many American colleges and universities, in Europe a core curriculum has long remained absent from institutions of higher learning. This is curious given that the idea of a core curriculum has European roots. The great European universities of the medieval period, such as the University of Paris, generally required students to do a degree in the liberal arts before continuing their more specialized studies.[1] A liberal arts degree included grammar, logic, philosophy and the sciences and was predominantly based on what we would now call core texts, such as Boethius' *Topica* and *Divisions*, Cicero's oratorical works, the Bible, Aristotle's *Ethics*, *Physics*, *Metaphysics* and *De Anima*, and so forth.[2] With the development of the modern research university in the late nineteenth century, however, the ideal of a common core all but disappeared at the European universities and, instead, the universities were increasingly structured according to individual disciplines and departments that tended to operate in separation of one another.

The current chapter deals with several attempts that were made to reinstate a core curriculum at Dutch universities during the course of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. In these debates, an ongoing tension between, on the one hand, the disciplinary, research-based approach and, on the other hand, the general and formative approach to higher education becomes apparent. Of the attempts to reinstate general education, several materialized at the margins rather than the heart of Dutch universities and did not meet with lasting success. As a result, for much of the twentieth century the disciplinary approach remained dominant. However, in the late twentieth century, several initiatives to provide students with a kind of education that spans the disciplines have shown significantly more promise. I will argue that the recent developments create opportunities for core text courses, which constitute an important way in which students can be provided with a general and formative education. The chapter includes an appreciative reading of the classical notion of education in Plato's *Republic*, which is founded on the notion that education has to do with who we are and how we develop as human beings.

Historical background

In the Netherlands, up until the end of the nineteenth century, physicians, teachers, ministers, lawyers, and other professionals were broadly educated in philosophy and the arts. There were two common bachelor degrees, one for students of the natural and medical sciences and the second for students of

[1] Olaf Pedersen, *The First Universities. Studium Generale and the Origins of University Education in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 271.
[2] Ibid., 278.

literature, history, law, and theology.[3] The common bachelors mainly focused on liberal arts courses. A law student, for example, was to obtain proof of attending classes in at least twenty-five courses in philosophy and the arts. Someone qualified as a lawyer more on account of his general education that shaped him to become a member of the learned class (in Dutch: *geleerde stand*) dedicated to serving the public good and less on account of his up-to-date technical knowledge.[4] Higher education was meant to civilize the mind first and foremost. Passing on specialized, technical or professional knowledge was considered of secondary importance.

In 1876, a new law on higher education was introduced with the intention to modernize the universities. The law reflected a shift in how people understood the purpose of a university education and deleted learnedness (in Dutch: *geleerdheid*) as one of these goals. Influenced by developments in Germany, the law anticipated the development of the research university with increased specialization within and between departments. Universities were to prepare students not to become gentlemen-professionals, but researchers or professionals.[5] At the heart of the reforms in Germany stood Wilhelm von Humboldt (1769-1835), a linguist who for a short while served as minister of education for the Prussian government and who proved to be extremely influential in the development of the research university. Humboldt emphasized the need for a university of letters or *universitas litterarum*, providing students with a well-rounded, humanist education in rhetoric, philosophy and literature. In part, this view was a good fit with the traditional understanding of education although, unfortunately, Humboldt's view separated the humanities from the natural sciences, whereas in the traditional view the natural sciences formed an organic whole with the humanities as part of the seven liberal arts.[6] Furthermore, Humboldt was wary of ideological and religious influences in the university. It was important to him that the university was a fundamentally neutral place and that professors and students embarked on the quest for knowledge through original and critical investigation in a disinterested way. Humboldt's ideal was a-political. Instead of being a citizen of the nation, the student was conceived as a member of the republic of learned people (in German: *Gelehrterrepublik*) or a citizen without a city. This is what it meant to be a true *Bildungsbürger*.[7] Humboldt's view was that scholars and students should be engaged in the common task of research as part of a community of scholars. This promoted the idea of the research university although, for Humboldt, research was meant to supplement and not substitute the central role of teaching.

Humboldt's influence on the development of the research university was tremendous, although not necessarily linear. As the research university developed in Germany, becoming a model for universities across the world, the natural sciences gained a more prominent position, and teaching lost its central

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[3] J.C.C. Rupp, *Van Oude en Nieuwe Universiteiten. De Verdringing van Duitse door Amerikaanse Invloeden op de Wetenschapsbeoefening en het Hoger Onderwijs in Nederland, 1945-1995* (Den Haag: Sdu Uitgevers, 1997), 59-60.

[4] Henri A. Krop, "Laat de Universiteit Meer dan een Vakschool Zijn," in *Universitaire Vormingsidealen. De Nederlandse Universiteiten sedert 1876*, ed. L. J. Dorsman and P. G. Knegtman (Hilversum: Verloren, 2006), 44.

[5] Herman de Liagre Böhl, "Vormingsidealen van Professoren tijdens het Interbellum," in *Universitaire Vormingsidealen. De Nederlandse Universiteiten sedert 1876*, ed. L. J. Dorsman and P. G. Knegtman (Hilversum: Verloren, 2006), 17.

[6] The classical liberal arts were divided into the *trivium* (grammar, logic, and rhetoric) and the *quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music).

[7] Rupp, *Van Oude en Nieuwe Universiteiten*, 52-55.

place at the university in the way that Humboldt had envisioned it. *Bildung* or the formation of character was increasingly understood to be the result of engagement less with ethics, rhetoric and philosophy and more with the scientific method of conducting research. Scientific neutrality was considered as the way towards objective, empirically verifiable knowledge and thinking. The student was to learn to observe facts and to infer principles from the facts. This image (*Bild*) after which the university was meant to shape (*bilden*) the student became increasingly more scientific and left increasingly less room for Humboldt's emphasis on creativity, eloquence and cultural reflection.

In the Netherlands, the universities more or less developed in line with the German understanding of the research university. In 1927, during the celebration of the 295th anniversary of the University of Amsterdam, its president argued that the old kind of universities were conservative in adhering to a canon of civilizing texts instead of embracing the new life of the mind, which showed its powers in the value-free observation of nature, discovering knowledge rather than preserving it and thinking on one's own terms rather than having reason clouded by dogma and preconceived opinion.[8] Nature and life itself, not parchment or books, were the main objects of the modern sciences.[9] This scientific understanding – scientific in the narrow meaning of the word as referring to the methodologies and epistemologies of the natural sciences – of the nature of research remains quite dominant at Dutch universities today making it harder, for example, for faculties of the humanities to legitimize their existence.

At the same time, as the research university developed in the Netherlands so did resistance against the idea of universities as highly specialized institutions dedicated to scientific research. For many, the university was to remain a place for general learning.[10] In particular the professions were thought to suffer from a lack of attention to general education. For a long time people cherished the idea that the medical sciences primarily educated physicians with a willingness to serve the patient and the common good and with the ability to do so in a prudent manner. In the 1930's, the physicist and psychologist Philip Kohnstamm (1875-1951), an authoritative voice in the public debate, argued that the 1876 law was the culmination of a "*positivistic tidal wave*" that favored detached, value-neutral scientific research over a more formative and civilizing education.[11] Kohnstamm lamented the restriction of academic freedom, critical thinking, and the disappearance of the great life questions from the modern universities.

As a result of the resistance against the idea of the university offering predominantly disciplinary, research-oriented education, the twentieth century witnessed three attempts to carve out a space for general learning at the Dutch universities. First of all, there was an effort to position the philosophy department at the heart of the university. The proposal was driven by the discipline itself; philosophers argued that the new, specialized model of the university did not do justice to the overarching relevance of philosophy, which had the potential to promote understanding of the coherence of the discipline and

[8] Ibid., 55.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Cf. Krop, "Laat de Universiteit Meer dan een Vakschool Zijn," 41.
[11] Ph. A. Kohnstamm, "Wijsbegeerte en Functie en Taak van de Universiteit," in *De Wijsbegeerte in haar Verhouding tot ons Hooger Onderwijs*, ed. Ph. Kohnstamm et. al. (Haarlem: Bohn, 1933), 12.

as such addresses some of the problems of narrow specialization.[12] After the Second World War, there was also an argument about civilization; philosophy was presented as one of the answers to the industrial and scientific barbarity of the Nazi-regime. The result of these discussions was a new law in 1960 that stipulated the creation of a central interfaculty (in Dutch: *Centrale Interfaculteit*) at each university. The interfaculty was meant to provide a home to professors in philosophy, sociology, psychology and anthropology and professors appointed in both philosophy and a disciplinary department such as law or the sciences. The interfaculty was meant to provide for the general education of all bachelor students at the universities. In practice, only one university, namely, the Erasmus University Rotterdam created a central interfaculty. The concept of an interfaculty lost appeal in the eighties and the idea that philosophy promoted insight into the coherence of disciplines was taken out of the law in 1986. Still, a few universities, such as the originally confessional (Protestant) VU University Amsterdam still require its students to fulfill a certain number of credit points in the philosophy of science and ethics.

Possibly, developments in the discipline of philosophy in the Netherlands have played a role in its failure to position itself at the center of universities. In Germany, the faculty of philosophy had more easily acquired a central position and was quite naturally thought to constitute the foundation of the German understanding of *Bildung*. The philosophy of Fichte, Schelling, Schleiermacher and Hegel provided a framework for understanding the foundation of German culture and identity, making philosophy an appropriate discipline for the cultural education of the German young elite. The Dutch tradition is not devoid of great philosophers, such as Erasmus, Grotius and Spinoza. However, for whatever reason, in the twentieth century faculties of philosophy were less oriented towards their own heroes and more towards German philosophy, in particular the fundamental philosophy of Kant, Nietzsche and Heidegger.[13] Although the Dutch philosophers were right to think of philosophy as the meta-science of sciences and, hence, a prerequisite for the academic formation of any student, the way in which the discipline evolved made it less well suited to provide for the student's cultural *Bildung*.

The second attempt at creating a space for general learning at the Dutch universities was the so-called Studium Generale, which was modeled on the medieval *studia generalia* that encouraged scholars to give lectures to a wider public.[14] The idea of the Studium Generale was influenced by the tradition of the liberal arts as practiced in the United States.[15] During the first few years after the Second World War, the Studium Generale, offering courses in philosophy, ethics, logic, aesthetics and so forth, was meant to promote reflection on the coherence between the different academic disciplines and was meant to have a civilizing influence. However, the Studium Generale never developed into a core program at the heart of the university. The courses were not required and individual departments were reluctant to make room for electives in their disciplinary curriculum. Moreover, the meaning of *Bildung* formulated in terms that were too general, making it unclear what kind of content the Studium Generale was meant to provide to the students. Today, the Studium Generale remains part of several universities as a place

[12] Cf. Krop, "Laat de Universiteit Meer dan een Vakschool Zijn," 39-53.
[13] Ibid., 51.
[14] Leen Dorsman, "Studium Generale: Een Mislukte Doorbraak (1945-1960)," in *Universitaire Vormingsidealen*, ed. L. J. Dorsman and P. G. Knegtman (Hilversum: Verloren, 2006), 55-68.
[15] Cf. J.C.C. Rupp, *Van Oude en Nieuwe Universiteiten*. See also Dorsman, "Studium Generale: Een Mislukte Doorbraak," 57.

where lectures are held that are open to the general public, promoting the university as an institution engaged in socially relevant research.

Next to these two institutional initiatives, there are two extraneous institutions in the Netherlands that are meant to, or at least thought to provide for the general education of the students. The first ones are the *corpora* (fraternities and sororities) that were thought to provide the best *Bildung* for the students.[16] After all, so one reasoned, the personal influence of professors on their students was limited especially once student numbers increased and, instead, students were thought to gain an education for life from the close interaction with their peers. Even today, the *corpora* can be said to provide their members with an ethos, although less attention is paid to their intellectual formation. Secondly, the Dutch gymnasia that constitute the upper tier of the high school system guaranteeing entrance to the university offer Latin, Greek, modern languages, cultural studies and mathematics and, in this way, contribute to the general education of the young before they enter university. In particular the ancient languages taught at the gymnasia were meant to familiarize the pupil to the roots of Western civilization and were thought to provide them with a foundation for the acquisition of modern languages. Nowadays, the number of hours spent on classical language acquisition at the gymnasia has dropped to the extent that there are serious concerns about the effectiveness of classical language education.[17] Furthermore, one could argue that general education at the level of high school is different in nature and scope compared to general education at the university level, when students are older and capable of reaching a higher level of intellectual development.

University colleges in the Netherlands

The third attempt to re-introduce general education to Dutch universities followed on the tails of a series of changes in the higher education policy of the European Union. In 1998 (Paris Declaration) and again in 1999 (Bologna Declaration) and every other consecutive year, the European Union ministers of education issued a series of joint statements. Together these are referred to as the Bologna-process, which has as its aim to harmonize higher education across Europe through the introduction of a shared system of credits and a dual system bachelor and master programs.[18] Up until the nineties, students at Dutch universities graduated with a degree in a specific discipline equivalent to the master level. There was no real equivalent to a bachelor degree as a cut-off point. This changed with the Bologna-process. The introduction of the bachelor – master structure opened up the opportunity to provide general education at the bachelor level, leaving specialized education to the master level. For the Netherlands, the Bologna-process came at a good time. Like other European countries, the Netherlands experienced a large influx of students into universities right after the Second World War. Student numbers increased from 30,000 in 1950 to 153,000 in 2000.[19] The increase in students was partly caused by politics; there was a general push for equal access to universities informed by a desire to emancipate the middle- and

[16] Böhl, "Vormingsidealen van Professoren tijdens het Interbellum," 20.
[17] S. P. van Bommel, "Classics between Prosperity and Crisis. Greek and Latin Education in 21st Century Holland," *Classiculus* (blog), May 3, 2016, http://www.addisco.nl/blog/classics-between-prosperity-and-crisis-bas-van-bommel.htm.
[18] "Bologna Declaration 1999," European Higher Education Area, accessed December 9, 2016, http://media.ehea.info/file/Ministerial_conferences/02/8/1999_Bologna_Declaration_English_553028.pdf.
[19] Peter Baggen, "De Wereld Veranderen: Universiteit en Overheidsbeleid in Nederland, 1960-2000," in *Universitaire Vormingsidealen*, ed. L. J. Dorsman and P. G. Knegtman (Hilversum: Verloren, 2006), 93-108.

lower classes. There was also an increase of demand for academically trained professionals such as engineers, economists, psychologists and so forth.[20] However, the increase in student numbers put pressure on the system financially and institutionally and in the 1990's the Dutch universities were ready for reform. The main reform that took place and that is relevant for general education at universities followed from the proposed bachelor-master system. This system provided room for the founding of university colleges offering broad bachelor degrees in the liberal arts and sciences. Whereas pre-Bologna most university colleges in Europe were founded as American satellite schools, post-Bologna an increasing number of European universities founded their own college.

In the Netherlands, this development had a significant impact on the university landscape. Utrecht University founded the first Dutch university college in 1998 and most Dutch universities followed suit. Today there are at least seven university colleges in the Netherlands.[21] The university colleges are relatively small and allow for intensive teaching and small class sizes. Most of the colleges are residential and have selective admission systems. From the start, the founders of the university colleges tended to favor the American system where students take a range of courses across the disciplines before deciding on their major, instead of the traditional Dutch pillared design in which high school graduates immediately start their university education with a specialized discipline. The founder of University College Utrecht and University College Roosevelt, Hans Adriaansens, had spent a year at Smith College in America in 1980 and had become intrigued by the liberal arts and sciences model of higher education, which explains some of the American influences on the curriculum at the university colleges. At the same time, there is also a more distinctively Dutch discourse developing on the nature of liberal arts and sciences education, which stresses the benefits of interdisciplinarity. [22]

In order to understand the kind of education offered by the university colleges, which in some ways is substantially different from the kind of education offered by the main research universities, it is helpful to take a closer look at the curriculum and learning goals of Amsterdam University College (AUC). AUC opened its doors in Amsterdam in 2009 as the college of both the University of Amsterdam and VU University Amsterdam. Its curriculum emphasizes the individual academic journey of the student, which has led some to call this model the candy-jar model. Students major in the sciences, social sciences, or humanities and within their major have a wide range of choices from different tracks, such as economics, political science, law or psychology in the social sciences. Furthermore, students take at least one course in each two majors outside of their own major. The curriculum has a range of core requirements. These involve courses in logic, global identity, academic writing, a big questions course, statistics for social science students and calculus for science students, one foreign language, and at least one internship or community project. From the traditional perspective one gap remains in the core curriculum, namely, a philosophy course, which is not a requirement even though the college does have a well-developed philosophy track and there is discussion about making a course in the philosophy of

[20] Ibid., 95.
[21] For a helpful overview of university colleges in Europe, see Marijk van der Wende, "The Emergence of Liberal Arts and Sciences Education in Europe: A Comparative Perspective," *Higher Education Policy*, 24 (2011): 237.
[22] For an interesting theorization of this approach for the humanities, see Marco de Waard, "Theme-Based Teaching and Interdisciplinary Learning," in *Doing Liberal Arts Education: Global Case Studies*, ed. Mikiko Nishimura and Toshiaki Sasao (Dordrecht: Springer, forthcoming).

science a core requirement. Recently, a course in rhetoric called Argumentation Theory and Classical Rhetoric has been added to the core curriculum. AUC does not have a core text curriculum but a large number of the so-called foundational courses, such as Classical and Modern Political Thought, Classical and Modern Sociological Thought, Law and Society, Economic Thought, and courses in the literature and philosophy tracks are based on core texts. Of the core text courses, the courses Big Books and Big Books in World Literature are the only one that are required to the extent that students have to take one big-something course, which can be Big Books or Big Books in World Literature, which are both core text-based, or Big History, Big Questions in Science, Big Questions in Future Society, or Big Data which are predominantly not core text based.

The push towards a general education, which is evident in the founding of the university colleges and their curricula, is a sign of the Dutch effort to expand the framework for higher education. The academic discourse in the Netherlands has had a tendency to define science in narrow terms as referring to the methodologies and aims of the *natural* sciences, and uses the same word science – in Dutch *wetenschap* - to apply to all academic disciplines. With this jargon there is a danger that the methodologies and aims of the natural sciences are applied at the exclusion of other ways of understanding. However, the model of specialized, discipline-based research university applies less well to an environment in which teaching instead of research is central, where the teachers oftentimes are not expected to do research,[23] and that explicitly offers liberal arts and sciences education. There is a kind of methodological and epistemological pluralism that is being developed at the university colleges. A course such as Classical and Modern Political Thought is less oriented towards research and more focused on engaging students in a Socratic dialogue about questions concerning justice and the good life. A course such as Peace Lab is based on experiential learning and invites students to reflect on the material by taking them on an actual journey to a war torn area. Such courses are less common in disciplinary programs at the main universities.

The broad approach to higher education at the university colleges is reflected in the learning outcomes. The main research universities, of which the University of Amsterdam (UvA) is a good example, focus in their learning goals explicitly on academic *Bildung*. Academic *Bildung*, defined by UvA policy, consists of the trained ability for "*critical and analytical thinking*" involving "*interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation and reflection.*"[24] This is done as part of an attempt to distinguish the research university from the universities of the applied sciences, which have learning goals that are more practical, applied, and experience-based. The UvA seeks to develop an academic community where teachers and students work together as a "*community of learners.*"[25] Students learn the art of

[23] At most Dutch university colleges, the relative lack of research time for teachers is a difficult issue. Some argue that all teachers teaching at a university should to be involved in research of some kind. Others argue that teaching is an art in itself and requires the full dedication of those who teach. My own view is that research and teaching should not be separated and that the liberal arts and sciences offer a unique environment for university college teachers to engage in new lines of research that are outside or that transcend the traditional disciplinary boundaries. Students are likely to profit from an environment where such new lines of research and new venues of publication are explored.

[24] "Academische Vorming," University of Amsterdam, accessed July 15, 2016, http://www.uva.nl/onderwijs/onderwijskwaliteit/visie/academische-vorming/academische-vorming.html.

[25] "Onderwijsvisie," University of Amsterdam, accessed July 15, 2016, http://www.uva.nl/over-de-uva/uva-profiel/beleidsstukken/onderwijsvisie/onderwijsvisie.html.

academic thinking as a member of the academic community. Last year, celebrating the 383th anniversary of the University of Amsterdam, its president Dymph van den Boom reinforced this understanding. *Bildung*, so she argued, is "*not just a plaything for dead German thinkers*," referring to Wilhelm von Humboldt.[26] The minister of education Jet Bussemaker, during her 2015 commencement address at the University of Utrecht, widened the concept of *Bildung*. She emphasized that the development of empathy, a moral compass, curiosity, and critical transdisciplinary thinking is an essential part of education.[27]

Based on the learning outcomes, AUC shares in an understanding of *Bildung* that goes beyond the intellectual or analytical or critical formation of the student. AUC recognizes the need for academic *Bildung* involving the capacity for independent critical thought, rational inquiry and self-directed learning, as mentioned in the *Academic Standards and Procedures* (2.3.2b).[28] But whereas research universities tend to value specialized disciplinary knowledge, in part because this helps shape the student as a successful academic researcher, AUC's learning outcomes stipulate "*breath of knowledge, as demonstrated by a general knowledge of the physical and natural world, a general knowledge of European and world histories, philosophical traditions, major religions, and cultural life worlds and an understanding of economic forces and political dynamics*" (2.3.1d). Also, the learning outcomes explicitly include "*intellectual curiosity and creativity, including understanding of the philosophical and methodological bases of research activity*" (2.3.7b). AUC's learning outcomes stress the need to develop empathy developed in real-life experiences (2.3.6b). Learning outcomes also include "*leadership skills, including a willingness to engage in constructive public discourse, to accept social and civic responsibilities and to speak out against prejudice, injustice and the abuse of power*" (2.3.7d), aiming at the formation of students as normatively alert and engaged members of society. The image of the student that emerges is someone who is able to think critically and analytically but not in a detached scientific way. Rather, AUC seeks to nurture students who are keenly involved in the world and have developed a reflective awareness of where they stand on social and political matters. We may say that students are trained not merely in their cognitive capacity but that the educational process at AUC seeks to develop the student as a whole. In this way, AUC's learning outcomes result in a notion of *Bildung* that is more ambitious compared to the notion of *Bildung* at the main research universities.

The intention to help students grow as human beings is strengthened by the requirement for all AUC students to live on campus during the three years of their degree. This is uncommon at Dutch universities and strengthens a sense of community in which students learn from each other. Moreover, the tutoring system at AUC reinforces the pedagogical philosophy that personal relationships between teachers – all tutors at AUC are also teachers – and students is important for the development of the student as a whole person. The tutoring system is largely administrative; tutors help students select their courses and construct their personal path through the curriculum. But there are also opportunities for coaching the students and helping them make choices in life by offering advice or a listening ear. With the founding

[26] Wolthekker, Dirk. "Bildung staat Centraal tijdens 383e Diesviering UvA," *Folia*, January 9, 2015, http://www.folia.nl/actueel/82779/bildung-staat-centraal-tijdens-383e-diesviering-uva.
[27] Maarten Huygen, "Studie moet ook karakter vormen," *NRC Handelsblad*, 31 augustus 2015.
[28] "Academic Standards and Procedures," Amsterdam University College, accessed July 15, 2016, http://www.auc.nl/downloads#anker-academic-standards-and-procedures.

of university colleges and the public rhetoric concerning *Bildung*,[29] we may say that there is a genuine momentum for Dutch higher education offering general, even formative, education as well as specialized, disciplinary education.

Education as the turning of the soul

So far, this chapter has dealt with the historical and institutional context in the Netherlands. My argument has been that the recent developments open up opportunities for general education and, as I argued, the kind of general education offered at the university colleges is pluralistic in its methodologies and epistemologies. Being a contribution to a book on core texts, this chapter also provides my own account of what it means to be well educated. For this, I take my cues from a text that has made an impact in my own life, namely, Plato's *Republic*.[30] Already as an undergraduate student in political science, I found myself gravitating towards reading great books more than the study of voting behavior, international politics, or political party systems. I wanted to understand the nature of politics and for that, so I thought, I needed to understand who we are as human beings and how we live together in political community. This led me to the study of core texts and when I was introduced to Plato's *Republic*, by a professor who is still my friend, I became hooked.

Plato's *Republic* provided me with confirmation for an approach to the study of politics that is more philosophical than it is empirical. The dialogue offers some of the most interesting arguments for the idea that a liberal education involves developing a critical distance from the empirical world of observable phenomena. In the middle parts of the *Republic*, Socrates suggests that the essence of justice is not something that we can observe with our senses but, rather, it transcends the phenomena in this world. The human mind can grasp these forms, including the form of justice, intellectually after a long period of training that includes music and mathematics – fields of study that for Plato reflected the enduring harmony of the universe – and philosophy. We may recognize a kind of liberal arts and sciences curriculum in the studies that, according to Plato, lead up to comprehension of the higher order of being. We do not discover pure justice by analyzing good laws or good actions, although we may recognize an action as a just one by virtue of its participation in the eternal form of justice. According to Plato, knowledge of the transcendent reality is crucial for any kind of real knowledge of the phenomena that we observe around us. Philosophy, one could say, is a prerequisite for truly understanding the tangible world around us.

According to Socrates in the *Republic*, this kind of intellectual training involves a crucial moment when the soul of the student is invited to turn around, away from the world of becoming to the world of what is. As an illustration, Socrates provides the reader with an image of the philosopher who is chained in a cave so that he can only see the shadows on a wall until his chains are broken so that he is able to turn away from the shadows and start his ascent towards the opening of the cave and the light of the sun. The turning around (in Greek: *periagoge*) constitutes a crucial educational moment for the philosopher:

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[29] Next to Jet Bussemaker's speech mentioned earlier, at least four of the commencement speeches at other Dutch universities addressed the need for *Bildung* and general education at the university level. Huygen, "Studie moet ook karakter vormen."

[30] Translations are from Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Tom Griffith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

"*Socrates: Education is not what some people proclaim it to be. What they say, roughly speaking, is that they are able to put knowledge into souls where none was before. Like putting sight into eyes which were blind.*

Glaucon: Yes, that is what they say.

Socrates: Whereas our present account indicates that this capacity in every soul, this instrument by means of which each person learns, is like an eye which can only be turned away from the darkness and towards the light by turning the whole body. The entire soul has to turn with it, away from what is coming to be, until it is able to bear the sight of what is, and in particular the brightest part of it. This is the part we call the good, isn't it?

Glaucon: Yes.

Socrates: Education, then, I said, would be the art of directing this instrument, of finding the easiest and most effective way of turning it round."[31]

Hence, education implies liberation from the world of the senses and the world of convention and common opinion. The breaking of the philosopher's chains illustrates the liberation of the philosopher's mind from the world of the shadows and from the idea that all we can know is observable with our senses. The path upwards towards the opening of the cave is the path of intellectual development that, for Plato, increasingly excludes sense perception and, hence, the empirical sciences. Instead, mathematics and philosophical reasoning lead one to finally grasp a higher and permanent order of being. Genuine education involves prodding the student to pursue a path that helps her to think more independently and critically about reality. Undoubtedly this kind of education transforms the student.

Secondly, Socrates emphasizes the turn of the *entire* soul. He says "*this instrument by means of which each person learns, is like an eye which can only be turned away from the darkness and towards the light by turning the whole body. The entire soul has to turn with it.*"[32] This means that the turn concerns not just the reasoning part, but also the spirited, emotional, and appetitive parts of the soul. Indeed, Socrates argues that if the reasoning part of the soul develops without being embedded in a harmonious emotional disposition, then the cleverness of the educated individual can turn awry as reason is made an instrument of the passions. We can say that Socrates' understanding of education is not merely about intellectual independence but about the development of the whole person. This makes sense in light of the early parts of the *Republic*, in particular book three, where Socrates argues that the emotions of the guardians are habituated towards harmony by means of the right kind of music and poetry. Socrates reiterates this argument at the end of book seven stating that "*everything that has been said so far been said precisely with a view to making sure that only people with orderly and reliable natures are to be introduced to argument.*"[33] In other words, the attunement of one's emotion to reason constitutes a genuine component of a liberal education. Liberal education concerns not just the training of the intellect but addresses the whole person.

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[31] Ibid., 518c-d.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid., 539d.

The goal of training students to develop a comprehensive and engaged understanding of human beings and politics and to develop minds they that they can call their own, is different from the discipline of political science, which means to train political *scientists*. The empirical political scientist is meant to be a disengaged, objective observer of data about politics. The aim of the empirical political sciences strictly speaking is to analyze data, theorize about it, and try to uncover regularities or law-like behavior; the methods are generally mirrored on the natural sciences, where questions about value and normativity do not occur. Now, the empirical political sciences often yield important insights or information that is useful for policy decisions and I do not want to downplay its achievements. But the empirical political scientist is generally led by the available data and is not pushed to develop an engaged driven by the quintessential intuition about how things could be otherwise. Nor is s/he pushed to develop an understanding of what is really just in the face of *apparent* justice. Political philosophy, in particular ancient political philosophy, trains the mind to think more independently about what is naturally just even in the face of what is conventionally just. This kind of intellectual independence is a crucial part of what it means to be educated as free person.

This means that, when it comes to a liberal education, political philosophy, but also the great works of literature, history, and art have an important role to play in order to provide the student with the necessary comprehensive and meaningful understanding of who we are as human beings and how we live and want to live in political community. By liberal education, I mean the kind of education that allows the student to think independently about convention and common opinion, making self-directed awareness and choice possible on account of having developed a fuller sense of what it means to be a human being. Furthermore, the great works of literature, history, theology and philosophy help to shape the student's entire soul – not only the intellect but also the emotions; not only one's reasoning but also one's imagination; not only one's analytical skills but also one's disposition and – even – one's heart. As a philosopher, I am keenly convinced that education means more than imparting specialist knowledge. Core texts, in my opinion, prod the student to expand his or her intellectual horizon and to seek understanding that goes beyond merely observing the empirical world. Core texts can reflect who we are and what we feel and think, in a way that disciplinary courses do not. They function, as it were, as a kind of mirror, helping us see things that we would otherwise not see. Core texts help the reader grow as a human being. As such, an education in core texts could be particularly at home at a university college.

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